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Kneeling for Social Justice: Epistemologies of Ignorance, Schemas, and Frames on Twitter

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KNEELING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE:
EPISTEMOLOGIES OF IGNORANCE, SCHEMAS, AND FRAMES ON TWITTER

A Thesis Presented
by
ROBERT J. RICE

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies,
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ABSTRACT

KNEELING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE: EPISTEMOLOGIES OF IGNORANCE, SCHEMAS, AND FRAMES ON TWITTER

May 2020

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In this thesis, 6,715 tweets from September 24, 2017 that directly relate to protests during the national anthem during National Football League games are analyzed. Through a qualitative examination of the symbols and logics that are used on Twitter, mechanisms of epistemic ignorance are illuminated. These epistemic maneuvers and techniques of neutralization help to connect individual latent cultural values and the broad framing of the movement to the perpetuation of ignorance and colorblindness. Logical maneuvers that perpetuate racism through constructed ignorance, like willfully reasoned ignorance, are illustrated throughout the data. The concepts of strategic framing and frame amplification are discussed in relation to the anti-protest discourse on Twitter; specifically, the centrality of Donald Trump's amplification of anti-protest messaging is discussed. Meaningful symbols related to the discourse are discussed in relation to political communities on Twitter. The limitations of the study are discussed alongside relevant theoretical insights, and numerous directions for future research are described. This project demonstrates the utility of closely reading social media to understand social and political context.

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to Milly, Georgia and Benedict

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CHAPTER1

INTRODUCTION

Despite purporting to be the “land of the free,” the United States of America is the site of persistent race-based discrimination. In the past, institutions such as slavery and legal segregation made discrimination overt. Today, racial discrimination is increasingly hidden, with social systems, laws, and policies designed to covertly suppress people of color, and maintain the status quo of white dominance (Coates 2003; Alexander 2010). Since the 2014 shooting of Michael Brown by police in Ferguson, MO, discussions of social justice and racial equality have reemerged in public discourse. Despite their focus on equality, these social movements are often surrounded by extremely polarized discourses, with both vehement proponents and detractors. Critics frame these movements as antagonistic to American values; examples of this include the FBI’s recently developed classification of “Black Identity Extremist” (Beydoun and Hansford 2017), and President Donald Trump’s vilification of people peacefully protesting social injustices. By denouncing and discrediting these movements, one implies that racism or discrimination does not exist, or at least that justice in these domains is not due.

One example of such public social justice discourse being vilified accompanies the National Football League (NFL) players protesting during the national anthem, led by Colin Kaepernick. Kaepernick, at the time a quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers, began sitting

on the bench during the national anthem to protest police violence and inequality. After a conversation with Nate Boyer, a former Green Beret and Seattle Seahawks long snapper, Kaepernick began to kneel on the sidelines, which allowed him to be next to his team, show respect to veterans, and continue his protest (Brinson 2016). Kaepernick's action spread across other NFL teams, although it took some time. Players knelt to protest police violence, mass incarceration, and broad systemic racism that is oppressive to non-whites, particularly African Americans, throughout the United States (NPR 2018, Mindock 2018). During the 2016-17 NFL season, the most player protestors during one week was 36; however, during the 2017-2018 season, President Trump advocated for the firing of protesting players. Directly after Trump's comments, 405 players knelt, representing 26 out of 32 NFL teams (Weffer, et al 2018). This was the peak of the protest, in terms of the number of players kneeling, and also the impact on public discourse.

The previously mentioned comments by President Trump at a rally, and the related public discourse will be of particular focus throughout this study. As seen by the peak in player protestors directly after the comments by Trump, that point in time is an important moment for the protests on the whole. There was an abundance of popular media coverage in the days directly following the comments, and the same is the case on social media platforms such as Twitter. Understanding the discourse of this particular moment, during the peak of the events, may help to understand how epistemologies of ignorance are constructed and propagated. As these protests are against well-documented problems of racial inequality, the fact that they are challenged and antagonized by public figures including the President presents an interesting case for studying the denial of racism in public discourse.

The goal of this project is to illuminate and illustrate how the discourse that can be

observed on Twitter relates to the perpetuation of racism. Throughout the paper, 280-character tweets will illuminate social processes and reflect concepts that are critical for understanding how progress toward justice is effectively denied. Although succinct, the tweets illustrate how much meaning can be compressed into specific language and discourse.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The current project builds on existing literature related to colorblind racism, epistemologies of ignorance, and social movements to better understand how the processes of ignorance occur on Twitter. Theoretically, the current project helps connect epistemic maneuvers of ignorance to broad frames and latent cultural understandings that people related to the protests. Methodologically, it expands on previous studies of online and racist discourse, and shows how qualitative analysis of tweets can elicit much more meaning than would seem possible from 280 characters. In all, the current research provides a link between individualized meaning-making, broad popular and social discourse, and the perpetuation of oppression.

The core theory and literature that this paper builds on relate to constructed ignorance and the ways that ignorance translates to societal level perpetuation of social problems, like racism and police brutality. The idea of an *epistemology of ignorance*, first introduced by Charles Mills (1997:18) but expanded on by Mueller (2017, 2018), is central to the current analysis; this work illuminates logics and maneuvers that allow individuals to rationalize that their racism is acceptable. Mueller explains how such epistemologies reflect, “*a process of knowing designed to produce not knowing* surrounding white privilege, culpability, and structural white supremacy” (2017:220). Mueller’s works relate to colorblind racism and colorblind ideology (Bonilla-Silva 2017); “colorblindness” refers to arguments that

deliberately avoid racialized discussions of social problems, thereby being “colorblind,” and how such ideology serves to perpetuate oppression by failing to consider solutions that necessarily account for race. Mueller explains how epistemic logics can justify passivity with regard to systemic racism by invoking colorblindness. Nepstad and Kenney’s (2018) analysis of protest-related discourse in newspaper comment sections also helps by shining light on neutralization tactics, discursive logics that demonstrate an effort to justify opposing the protests; the current project helps to link this work to the concept of epistemic ignorance. I also refer to the theoretical concepts of schemas and frames (Wood, et al. 2018; Benford and Snow 2000); these concepts help to explain how movements are described across public discourse (framed) and how the values inherent to these frames are related to. These concepts help relate epistemological ignorance to a broad discourse about racism across platforms, online and offline.

Methodologically, the current analysis aligns more with qualitative sociology than with network-based or quantitative analysis of online discourse. Existing scholarship of Twitter (Murthy 2017; Himelboim and Han 2014) highlights how Twitter’s social networks can foster connections between those who otherwise wouldn’t be able to connect. This work is helpful for understanding the context of the platform, but not necessarily ignorant logic. The current analysis builds on several existing qualitative studies of the internet to demonstrate how the particular mechanisms of ignorance function online. Nepstad and Kenney (2018) provide a qualitative analysis of the protests during the national anthem, much like the current study; rather than data based on a social media platform like Twitter, the authors analyzed logics and discursive patterns as seen on newspaper websites. Jessie Daniels (2009) describes how some websites strategically “cloak” racism behind false-

histories and logics that justify racism; she finds that the, “epistemological peril of white supremacy online lies in its ability to change how we know what we say we know about issues [...] such as civil rights” (189). As will be seen throughout the results, such an obfuscation of facts relates clearly back to epistemic ignorance, and observing this on Twitter will illuminate how processes of supremacy transfer between online platforms and offline life.

While I do not intend to conduct quantitative analysis, existing quantitative and network-based research can help to guide further studies, and can highlight methodological opportunities. Ray, et al. (2017) and Jackson and Foucault-Welles (2015) highlight how integrated Twitter is into social movements and collective actions; the former investigated the discourses related to the unrest in Ferguson, and the latter analyzed online resistance to the NYPD using Twitter for public outreach. Finally, Rebecca Lewis’s qualitative analysis of reactionary (alt-)right ideology on YouTube demonstrates the depth of meaning that can be drawn out of individual posts to social media platforms; while her study refers to high-profile and celebrity users and draws a network of connections between them, the analysis of discursive meaning is informative for the current project.

Hallett, et al. (2019) propose a sociology of public ideas and public social science, and I see the current project situating into that literature. Theoretically, it illuminates processes that perpetuate systemic oppression, and also the ways ignorance around such systemic oppression is understood and propagated. A holistic, qualitative analysis of the data helps relate the logics and symbols observed back to the theoretical framework, but also serves as a demonstration of the way discourse related to social movements occurs on Twitter

CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND DATA

The current methodology is an in-depth, qualitative analysis of the symbols and language that occur on Twitter. I have chosen Twitter as the site for this study because the discourse is plentiful, politically and theoretically relevant, and the sample can be directly related to the anthem protests. As Ray, et al, write, “there is something unique about collecting and examining the creation of narratives and the formation of identities as they are evolving;” this is the goal of my study (2017:3). Posts related to the NFL player protests will be central to the study; so, all content analyzed will be directly related to this topic. As this subject has received much recent media coverage, the content to analyze is abundant.

The specific sample and methods are designed to provide a snapshot of the Twitter discourse and interactions at a key point of the anthem protests. Using NVivo 12, I analyzed 6,715 tweets that were found with the specific search parameters: “nfl anthem protests since:2017-09-24 until:2017-09-25.” The date in question, September 24, 2017, is the Sunday that immediately followed President Trump’s inciteful comments about the protestors, and also represents the peak of the protests (Weffer et al 2017). From the sample, each tweet was coded first according to substantive themes that emerged, and then organized into patterns of logics. Every tweet that was downloaded as a part of the sample was analyzed, but only anti-protest tweets will be considered in the results. It may be beneficial to consider pro-protest or neutral arguments in future research, but doing so throughout the

current study risks clouding out the anti-protest frames, schemas, and epistemologies of ignorance.

Despite each tweet being constrained to contain the terms “NFL,” “anthem,” and “protest,” there is a wide range of meanings that can be discerned from the data. Thousands of tweets contain hyperlinks to other websites, sharing news and opinions about the protests. Out of 6,715 tweets, 1,867 include “.com,” 116 include “.org,” and 39 include “.net” (total $n=2,022$, or 30.11% of the total sample). Hundreds of those tweets are links being shared en masse by seemingly unrelated blogging sites; for example, a Reuters article with the headline “NFL players, owners, defy Trump on anthem protests,” was shared 446 times, including by accounts such as “Now Lifestyle” (@nowlifestyle3), “Lets Blog Off” (@letsblogoff), “Referral Kings” (@ReferralKings), “SaleSpree.com” (@salespreeCOM), and “FerretBuzz” (@ferretbuzz1). These accounts are totally unrelated to the discourse related to the subject, but sharing syndicated news links (like from Reuters and the Associated Press) increases the chance that an unwitting Twitter user will click through a link they’ve shared, increasing their advertising reach. Patterns like this may help to understand how the phrase “anthem protest” became such a broadly understood; someone who follows “FerretBuzz” may not follow sports news, which means it is possible that the only reference they would have would be from an article framing it as an “anthem protest.” However, such an analysis does not provide context for understanding the specific types of logic that justify epistemic ignorance.

Focusing toward political discourse and the denial of social justice, patterns of certain media outlets and political ideology can further contextualize the data (Figure 1). The subject of the “anthem protest” is inherently political, and examining the surrounding “debate” about the politics of justice helps to illustrate broad patterns of media polarization.

Figure 1: Frequency of Media Related Keywords

Search Term	Times Appeared in Data
Trump	5,223
Fox	454
Breitbart	227
ThinkProgress	176
CNN	154
The Blaze	28
MSNBC	3

Such a disparity between the far-right sources (Fox, Breitbart, and The Blaze) and the left (MSNBC and ThinkProgress) illustrates the skew of the discourse, at least as it pertains to these particular keywords. Other political aspects of the data have a similar skew; for example, the terms, “#TakeTheKnee” and “#TakeAKnee” combine for 290 appearances throughout the data, while the term “boycott” appears 1,032 times. The general discursive trends and language that can’t be searched word-by-word also subjectively follow this pattern. Pro-protest discourse and logical arguments often came as a response or a challenge to anti-protest logic, but not as forcefully as tweets that assert the protests are negative. These specific logics are the subject of the analysis to come. Broadly, these themes do represent substantial segments of the total sample, and provide theoretically interesting evidence of epistemologies of ignorance. The specific themes and tweets that are analyzed were selected because they clearly represent the logics of ignorance. Similar tweets may not be word-for-word matches, but often represent similar arguments and viewpoints to the ones illustrated and pulled for in-depth analysis throughout the paper. The following analysis

attempts to paint a picture of the discourse as it can be observed on Twitter, and also to illuminate the many ways that understanding anti-protest symbols and discourse opens up ways to contextualize reactions to the events. In her collection of essays, *Thick: And Other Essays*, sociologist Tressie McMillan Cottom writes: “Whiteness, the idea, the identity tethered to no nation of origin no place, no gods, exists only if it can expand enough to defend its position over every group that challenges the throne” (2019:112). This continual defense of whiteness is what I captured on Twitter. As the protesters during the national anthem “challenged the throne,” whiteness reacted. Many symbols, tactics of delegitimation, and forms of discourse emerged as insightful themes and analytical concepts. Understanding how such symbols represent reactive whiteness helps to understand racism on the whole. While individual tweets are often not overtly racist in terms of the words they use, understanding how different symbols and ideas reflect epistemologies of ignorance can help to contextualize “the big picture.” By illustrating symbols and patterns of racism and social justice denial, this study helps to identify ways that whiteness justifies its supremacy.

Although limited to 280 characters, tweets are a medium that provide rich data with the potential to illuminate ways people engage with current events, social movements, and progress toward equality. By observing trends and similarities in how individuals represent their opposition to the protests during the national anthem, researchers can better understand the role of Twitter related to the discourse of social movements, and how that discourse is related to individual Twitter users’ values and beliefs. Building off of previous research (Nepstad and Kenney 2018), the study finds that anti-protest users delegitimated the protests on Twitter by stigmatizing protestors’ character, imposing tactical costs, and creating new

negative meanings for the protests. As users enact such delegitimation through their tweets, epistemologies of ignorance are deliberately justified. The importance of pictographic and textual symbols also became clear throughout the analysis, and the ways such symbols relate to the protests is discussed throughout the findings. Ultimately, this project contributes to what Mueller (2018) describes, as a "sociology of ignorance," by showing how individuals shape their arguments on Twitter, how their arguments are logically justified, and how this leads to the perpetuation of injustice.

The social, cultural, and discursive contexts of the protests during the national anthem are important to consider throughout the analysis, and help to illustrate the pervasiveness of the event. The ongoing protests by NFL players were covered widely by mainstream and digital media outlets, ranging from local sports outlets to national political cable news. The ways that the protests were framed and described by the popular media, as being an “anthem protest,” meaningfully impacted the discourse surrounding the events. As Boykoff and Carrington (2019) illuminate, this framing was ultimately detrimental to the protest’s goals, ending police brutality and systemic racism. As “anthem protest,” unfortunately, became the working title of the event in the media discourse, I used it as the entryway into the current data. Regarding the cultural and political context of the study, it is also necessary to consider the role of President Trump and his rhetoric; the day in question was chosen as it was directly after the President urged players be punished by firing or suspension. Despite not being a part of the search term that generated this project’s data, the word “Trump” appeared 5,223 times, pointing to his ubiquity in the discourse surrounding the event. By comparison, the symbol “#” appeared 3,129 times, which highlights not only how much the word Trump appeared, but also the shift away from hashtags as they relate to Twitter discourse. Twitter users of all

types and follower sizes contributed to the discourse surrounding the “NFL anthem protests.”

Examining how users relate and adapt their posts to the popular discourse may provide insights into social movements, (anti)racism, framing, ideology, and some of the symbols of supremacy.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Conceptualizing Epistemologies of Ignorance on Twitter

The theoretical concepts of schemas, frames, and epistemologies of ignorance are important for understanding how the discourse surrounding the anthem protests materialized. Schemas and frames refer to the ways individuals shape and come to know and relate to the discourse surrounding public events, like the protests. The theory of epistemologies of ignorance, especially as described by Mueller (2017, 2018), examines the processes of actively cultivated racism and racial ignorance. A combination of these theories will be seen in all of the patterns, themes, and symbols throughout the analysis, so I will first contextualize the concepts to the results.

Frames

Despite the positions and goals of the protests having been articulated by player leadership, anti-protest discourse as examined in the current data often asserts that the protests are not a good avenue for pursuing racial progress or justice. Clearly, there is a meaningful disconnect between the goals and methods of the protest as explained by the protestors and the goals and methods described by those who stand against the protests. Despite being a collective action toward justice, much of the anti-protest discourse argues it

is not doing that, or that it is not needed. The processes of framing can be seen in the ways that individuals assert that others are protesting in a wrong or negative way (Benford and Snow 2000:623).

The discursive processes of frame development, “refer to the talk and conversation – the speech acts – and written communications of movement members that occur primarily in the context of, or in relation to, movement activities” (Benford and Snow 2000:623). Certainly, the use of Twitter to share ideas, especially relating to the protests during the anthem, would constitute a discursive process; two processes, frame articulation and frame amplification contribute to the overall development of a broad discursive frame of collective action. The authors explain that, “frame articulation involves the connection and alignment of events and experiences so that they hang together in a relatively unified and compelling fashion” (623). In the context of anti-protest discourse, frame articulation can be seen in the ways people explain their positions, post about personal experiences with the protest, or join the conversation to highlight how the motives are off-base. Such articulation can also be seen from players who were actively involved in the protests. For example, Colin Kaepernick shared a video of Eric Reid clarifying the meaning of the protests; although this came approximately one month before the date of this project’s data, the example highlights the use of Twitter in frame articulation in the context of the same collective action.

Figure 2: August 2017 Kaepernick Tweet



Frame amplification, “involves accenting and highlighting some issues, events, or beliefs as being more salient than others” (623). This can be seen in some of the discourse that argues that the protests are not worth as much as, for example, standing during the anthem. It also, “involves the idealization, embellishment, clarification, or invigoration of existing values or beliefs” (624). In the case of anti-protest discourse, existing values of, for example, “Americanness,” conservatism, and being “anti-snowflake,” are certainly invigorated; the actual meanings of the protests are also embellished in the discourse, as seen in the creation of new negative meanings. Because this framing both amplifies existing values and embellishes ones that adherents would stand against, these processes create a frame that is extremely attractive to socially and culturally reactionary individuals. Further, President Trump’s posts that argue for the firing and suspension of players amplify the anti-protest frame; in this way, Trump’s posts amplify the idea that there is a punishment deserved by the players, whether it is for simply being “un-American,” or it is for protesting the wrong way, or on the clock. The mainstream media and political discourse of the events,

including the frame of “anthem protests” play a role in the discursive articulation and amplification. Together with Mueller’s work on epistemologies of ignorance, analysis of the processes of framing may help to illuminate the anti-protest discourse as a frame of active non-knowledge, strategically manipulated to ensure that progress toward equality is not made.

Schemas

Examining how social movements are framed and then transformed provides important context for understanding the power dynamics surrounding such movements, including the protests during the anthem. Still, a broad context does not necessarily explain personalized motivations to engage with such a frame. The concept of schemas, as described by Wood, et al (2018), helps to link the big picture of a particular event to individualized actions that may come out as a response. They describe how, “in some cases, a frame evokes a particular response because it violates a particular cultural model, such that the frame evokes a response only in those that share a similar model” (Wood et al, 2018:23). For example, the authors describe how a cinephile or someone trained in film criticism may pick up on subtleties in film that “normal” moviegoers would not recognize as significant (Wood et al, 2018:23). Examining the protests during the national anthem through the lens of schemas and frames helps to identify patterns of power that are important to the perpetuation of oppression. Furthermore, schemas may help to examine how racist or anti-protest beliefs and are “activated” by the discourse (Hopkins 2019).

Wood et al. describe two types of schemas, image schemas and foundational schemas. Image schemas are ways of engaging with a situation based around “repeated

embodied experience,” including the visual image, sensory perception, or spatial position; the authors (2018:8) describe how, for example, “the phrase “[o]nce he gets rolling, you'll never get him to stop talking” (Gibbs and Colston 2006:262) activates the same MOMENTUM schema that would be activated if the body were actually experiencing momentum.” (The authors also explain that the standard convention for writing about schemas is to use small capitals.) Ascertaining the evocation of these meanings is impossible through tweets, but the concept of image schema as it relates to framing is still helpful. According to Wood et al, “[w]hen image-schematic mappings are conventionalized, actors may use them strategically to evoke certain meanings” (2018:9). In this conception, the strategic use of symbols that relate to conventionalized image schemas is similar to the concept of strategic framing in the way specific meanings are evoked. Considering the symbols related to anti-protest framing may then help to relate the data to theoretical image-schematic mappings.

The concept of foundational schemas may be useful for illuminating the ways individuals respond to specific frames. As described by Wood et al, foundational schemas are foundational, “because they are central to the organization of many distinct domains for specific times, places, and subgroups (2018:10). For example, citing Shore (1998), the authors describe a “center-periphery schema,” with activities, and the perception of those activities, centered around the orientation of the village; dignified and formal activities take place in the center, while the periphery is home to activities that would be frowned upon in the center. In this case, the foundational schema organizes the activities of the Samoan villagers, based around the foundational knowledge they have of the village. Berl and Hewitt (2015) and Sonoda et al. (2018:155) have discussed foundational schema in the Congo Basin,

with the latter stating that “Congo Basin hunter-gatherer societies are said to share cultural models, such as egalitarianism, respect for individual autonomy, and the process of giving and sharing.” In order for these values to be foundational and have an effect on the way people understand the world, those meanings need to be encoded as foundational. Sonoda et al. (2018:163) go on to state that, “foundational schemas are communicatively produced and emerge in the venues of cultural knowledge production,” and describe how cultural knowledge is transmitted to children of the culture:

we can see that by performing their daily activities and through acquiring knowledge and skills, children also learn ways of feeling and thinking, i.e., foundational schemas, thanks to the behavior modelled by adults with them. Although we can assume that children might not understand what the foundational schema itself is, they come to understand how they should behave in their actual experience with others, which is a process of learning.

As these values are acquired and internalized to be the “common sense” orientation toward society, they become truly foundational to the understandings people have of their worlds.

In the current data, a theoretical foundational schema of AMERICAN AUTHORITY may relate to much of the discourse observed. This may be related to the values of “American identity,” nationalism, and also the duty not to challenge the perceived values of the United States (or the idea of the United States). For example, I searched “true American,” and the result was two tweets: first, “Whirly Girl” (@TrumpsWirl) said, “If only the NFL were true Americans” alongside news of NASCAR owners stating they would not tolerate “anthem protests;” and second, “Renee Evans” (@politicallynuts) tweeted, “True Americans believe in the right to peacefully protest. Nothing more peaceful than kneeling during the Anthem! @NFL.” In both of these tweets, the user is appealing to the supposed high values of the United States. This is one search term that happened to demonstrate a clear split of ideologically different evocations of AMERICAN AUTHORITY. Although not inherently

ideological, the current project examines how epistemologies of ignorance and connected evocations of the schema may relate to ideologies of colorblindness and fascism more broadly.

The cultural values of AMERICAN AUTHORITY may be transmitted and encoded as common sense throughout childhood, as children recite the Pledge of Allegiance, and may learn to respect the flag and the idea of American glory. The culture of politics in the United States continuously feeds these values, maintaining the supremacy of the institution of the United States while simultaneously ignoring systematic injustice. Horkheimer and Adorno (1947) discuss “the culture industry” as the production of media solely to be continuously consumed, generating perpetual consumers of products and ideologies; the polarization of discourse surrounding the protests and the media presence may illuminate the discursive impact of the culture industry. Further, Adorno et al. (1950) describe features of *The Authoritarian Personality*, like appealing to authority and reverence of institutions; as authoritarian and fascist beliefs (perhaps an ideological reaction to the evocation of AMERICAN AUTHORITY) are driven by the culture industry, studying the propagation of related discourse may illuminate opportunities to attack and dismantle the oppressive systems.

Epistemologies of Ignorance

As individuals post to Twitter challenging the protests during the national anthem, they insist that police brutality and racial oppression are not a social problem. The language and logic that these individuals use in such cases helps to reveal how they construct epistemologies of ignorance. Building off of the broad framework of colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2017), Mueller (2017:222) describes how racial ideologies are “grounded in

socio-cognitive processes that distort and suppress whites' capacity for 'knowing' about matters of racism and white supremacy—what critical race philosopher Charles Mills (1997, 2007) refers to as epistemologies of ignorance.” The concepts of schemas and frames as previously described may serve as part of the cognitive processes that construct epistemologies of ignorance.

Mueller's 2017 study of colorblindness and epistemological ignorance in student interviews provides helpful typologies of “epistemic maneuvers” (2017:225); these actions correspond to the different ways that subjects avoided confronting the racial reality of society. Four ways that individuals maneuver around the discussion of racism are described by Mueller: 1) evasion; 2) willfully reasoned colorblindness; 3) tautologically reasoned ignorance; and 4) mystification of practical solutions. In all, they describe how racial ignorance is justified. Each of the categories will be examined throughout the analysis to come, and they serve well as links between broad theoretical concepts (e.g. schemas and frames) and the on-the-ground mechanisms of ignorance. Similarly, these epistemic maneuvers (which relate directly to racial ignorance) help to theoretically link the data to the Nepstad and Kenny's concept of tactical delegitimation (which relate to the movement as a whole; 2018).

In a 2018 paper, Mueller proposes to “[advance] a sociology of ignorance in the study of racism and racial non-knowing” (1). The current project seeks to contribute to such a literature by illustrating mechanisms that perpetuate ignorance on Twitter. In her conclusion and suggestions for further research, Mueller (2018:15) asks: “What are the means by which ignorance can be coerced and knowledge withheld and, relatedly, under what conditions is knowledge resisted and ignorance militantly defended?” The current project may help to

highlight processes and mechanisms that facilitate the active cultivation of ignorance and denial of racism. Observing the symbols, patterns, and themes in the discourse that contribute to such ignorance may provide researchers a better sense of how meanings are made in the process of being ignorant.


Symbols in Anti-Protest Discourse


Constructing allegiances with symbols

Examining how symbols and symbolic language are used on Twitter is necessary for a holistic analysis. Seemingly straightforward language combined with meaningful symbols can allow for insightful analysis. Theoretically relevant symbols may relate to an individual's affiliation to one movement or another. Symbols used together can demonstrate the relationships between different movements, and also how the symbols may relate to one's presentation of a political identity. Understanding the symbols of right-wing, anti-protest discourse can help to illuminate meaning in otherwise inconsequential tweets. Take, for example, this tweet from Twitter user @TFoolary:

Figure 3: Tweet by @TFoolary



This post by “Tom” has multiple symbols to consider. First, the red X emoji () helps to clarify the meaning; this symbol is used by right-wing accounts to show their belief in having been “shadow-banned,” on Twitter (as Described by *The Daily Beast*’s Will Sommer in 2018). Especially in the context of the current study, such a symbol also represents anti-protest, anti-“PC” attitudes. Further, the symbolic meaning of the tweet is essentially imploring “good” NFL players to kneel, causing harm to protesters who would not be protected. At first glance, without knowledge of football or symbols of the online-right, this tweet may seem relatively innocuous, even a joke. If analysis is done with regard only for words (or numbers, or without taking into account multiple perspectives) then the correct messaging and meaning may be harder to discern, and ultimately different conclusions may be drawn.

In this way, identifying relevant symbols can help researchers understand where a person “aligns” in relation to movements, politics, or discourse in general. Symbols that emerge in the protest discourse may also appear in discussions of other movements or issues. These symbols may help to “tag” oneself as adhering or aligning with a certain “side” or angle of a public issue. For example, the Red X symbol is not specific to the anthem protests, but in the context of the protest it can help to illuminate where one may stand. “Shadow-banning” (what the symbol refers to) is the supposed deplatforming and censorship of posts from platforms. While Twitter denies having shadow-banned anyone, the false narrative was taken up into the right-wing discourse by influential figures; for example, Representative Devin Nunes (R-CA) tweeted that, “  Censorship of conservatives continues... #Shadowbanned” alongside a link to [dailycaller.com](https://www.dailycaller.com). Similarly, the derogatory term “snowflake” has meaning with regard to this specific debate, but also in the broader cultural

and social context. For example, “Bart Bartlett” (@BartBuzz) tweeted: “After today’s National Anthem protests my NFL season is officially over. Pretty soon only the snowflakes will be watching.” Snowflakes here is being used in reference to those that still watch the NFL, but this also solidifies the poster as *not a snowflake*.

The term “snowflake” in this context is helpful for understanding how individuals think about the anthem protests, but also other people and social movements in general. In Chuck Palahniuk’s 1996 book and now movie *Fight Club*, the character Tyler Durden reminds his followers, “You are not a beautiful and unique snowflake. You are the same decaying organic matter as everyone, and we are all part of the same compost pile” (133). Although it not certain that this is where the contemporary right-wing insult originated, the message is the same. The insult is wielded against those who are perceived to be asking for too much, or thinking of themselves as deserving of something. Notably, the meaning has shifted to encompass resistance to what is perceived to be “right-wing” thought, such as gun control, climate change, and healthcare reform. For example, this tweet from the Twitter account “@Trump2Usa,” which also has a Trump image as an avatar, shows how the term is used with relation to climate change:

Figure 4: Tweet by @Trump2Usa

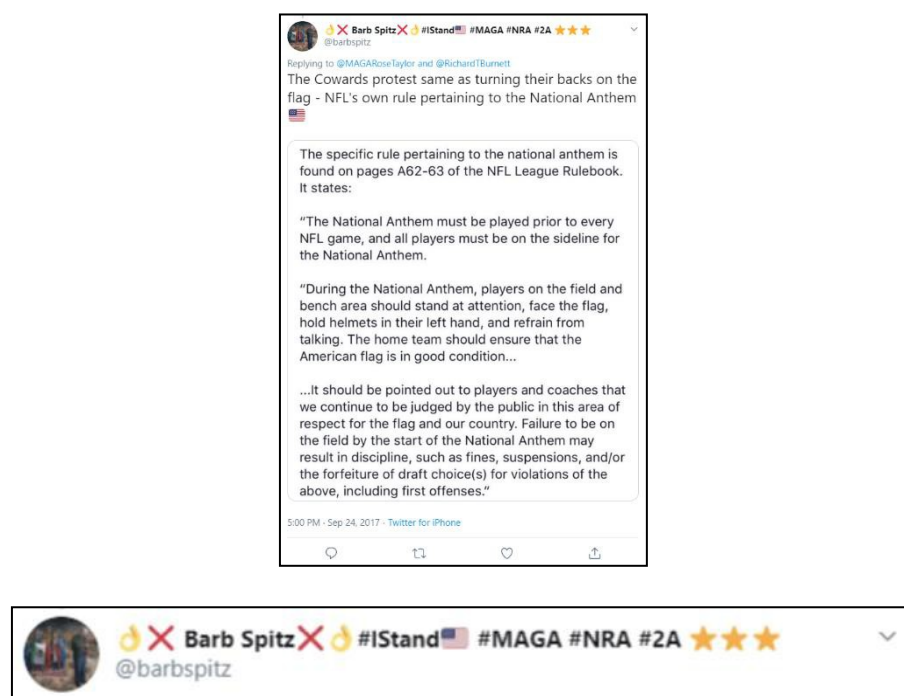


The discourse surrounding global climate change and the protests during the national anthem are not inherently linked, but by looking at similarities in the language, better insight may be gained into views toward social movements and epistemologies of ignorance. The particular example of climate change is helpful to consider because it, like systemic racism, can be clearly documented as empirical fact. By regarding climate change as a joke that would scare young people and snowflakes, the reality of the climate disaster (and thus the necessity of responding to it) are essentially denied. Cross-movement language and symbology may reflect how values and beliefs may be “activated” by the popular discourse surrounding the various subjects.

In the hypothetical AMERICAN AUTHORITY schema, calls for climate action may evoke responses if they challenge “American institutions.” Again, the evocation of this schema is not necessarily right-wing. For example, the Sunrise Movement (a youth organization for climate justice) documented Representative Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) rejecting their calls for action; in her rebuttal to the group, the Congresswoman is quoted as having said to the children, “you didn’t vote for me,” and, “I’ve gotten elected. I just ran. I was elected by almost a million vote plurality and I know what I’m doing. Maybe people should listen a little bit” (Beckett 2019). By appealing to the institution of American government and the high values of the political process, the liberal politician is effectively able to deny that climate action is needed. As the AMERICAN AUTHORITY schema is evoked in individuals who adhere to ideological colorblindness and authoritarianism, symbols like “snowflake” can highlight opposition across various progressive movements. While a term like “snowflake” may be a broad symbol, some users include more specific tags.

For example, consider the display name of Twitter user @barbspitz

Figure 5: Tweet and handle of “Barb Spitz”



While the content of this user’s post *does* engage in tactical delegitimation, particularly imposing tactical costs, their self-identification is of primary interest. “Barb” uses multiple tags and symbols to associate their identity and their posts with a particular discourse; as these symbols are added to her profile and display name, it would seem they want them to be seen as important identity markers; the account’s profile features the symbolic tags of #AlwaysTrump (perhaps to counter #NeverTrump), #KAG and #MAGA alongside “Dutch born Naturalized U.S. citizen,” demonstrating that, for this account, those tags may also relate to the identity being portrayed. That identity may relate to many different movements. “#IStand” does directly relate to the topic of the current project, and the other symbols illustrate which issues are on the same “side” of the discourse, including pro-

Trump tags. Understanding how these other tags relate to anti-protest discourse is helpful for also understanding how meanings are made and why they may be used in unison. The example of “snowflake” being used with regard to the protests and climate change denial is helpful to consider here as well.

Looking at the framing of issues and the schemas that those frames evoke may help to analyze the meanings of symbols across different contexts. Likewise, analyzing schemas can be insightful when considering how issues come to be framed. “Barb Spitz’s” posts illustrate how meanings can be maintained over time; they posted negatively about the anthem protest during September of 2017, when they advocated for players to be punished for kneeling during the anthem. Interestingly, an investigation of their timeline reveals additional posts from July 2019 that featured very similar language and discourse. A few of the posts from 2019 directly relate to the national anthem and the NFL protests, referencing the US Women’s soccer team derogatorily, because Megan Rapinoe knelt during the anthem.¹

Other tags in @barbspitz’s display name also illustrate how symbolic meanings can be similar across issues. For example, the relationships between The NRA (National Rifle Association) and the 2nd Amendment (#2A) are not linked to the NFL protests by a shared “topic,” both of those are related to guns – not the protest, not the national anthem, or even the flag. While the use of guns by police and their role in gun violence are central and necessary parts of the discussion surrounding police violence against Black people, that is not what the tags mean. In this case, just like the “#Istand” tag, they serve “Barb” as a marker that they are on what they would consider the “right side” of the discourse. Similarly, tags

¹ <https://twitter.com/DrEtiquette/status/1149296842020139008?s=20>; user @barbspitz replied that they’re brainless.

like the “thin blue line” icon, military references and symbology, and references to the campaign and presidency of Donald Trump, are markers that may provide additional context for understanding how one may position themselves around an issue. Symbols that can be seen, like hashtags, images, or emoticons can signify an adherence to a particular ideology; in some cases, totally unrelated tags to a particular topic actually have meaning when considering how they relate in the context of the discourse. For example, the NRA and being anti-protest relate in the broad context of conservative, right-wing discourse. As individuals use these symbols in their posts and in their communication, it shows that they are contributing to that “side” of the discourse, and standing against the opposition by highlighting their adherence to the “right” discourse.

These other posts, and the types of discourse they reference, help to show the similarities in reactions to different events. Further, this example showcases the consistency in discourse and “anti-left” reactions across multiple events. “Barb” posted negatively about the NFL protests in 2017, the protests in 2019, and comments frequently on “right” social and political discourse. If there are protests in the 2020 NFL season, one may reasonably expect a similar reaction. If that does end up being the case, similar framings of the protests as negative will evoke similar reactions against the dissent because they challenge specific culturally instilled values; importantly though, like a sort of collective memory, new negative meanings and ignorant anti-protest discourse from previous years may carry over and even become a part of the ongoing frame. This is especially so when considering how those in power may continue to amplify and transform the frame (e.g. Trump with the anti-protest tweets). Furthermore, analyzing how people symbolize their beliefs and how they relate in the same ways to different issues may illuminate how and why individuals align with certain

discourses. In the context of the protests during the anthem, the ongoing negative framing amounts to willfully reasoned colorblindness, which perpetuates an ignorant frame by excusing opposition for some other reason (Mueller 2017); this willfully reasoned ignorance can be seen in the denial of climate change, because the warnings and activism are coming from “snowflakes,” it is not worth listening to.

Symbols as representations of political identity

The assemblage of symbols that have been discussed hold specific meanings related to political discourse and ideology. Individuals use these symbols to identify and align themselves ideologically against social justice. On Twitter as well as other social media platforms, these symbols may reflect how one wishes to present themselves in relation to political discourse. Groups of individuals don’t all necessarily identify with movements in the same ways, but recurring symbols (including language) can highlight meaningful markers of right-wing political community.

One way Twitter users represented their personalities was through the language they used and the emotions they conveyed with their tweets. Emotional language can convey how a user wants to appear to align with regard to the protests, and such anger may be a theoretically relevant symbol to consider. DiAngelo (2018:100) writes that “When ideologies such as colorblindness, meritocracy, and individualism are challenged, intense emotional reactions are common.” These types of intense reactions can be seen in the current data. As individuals perform their online anger, they assert they are right to be angry. By “right,” I

mean these users perceive themselves to be in a good position (authoritatively, ethically, legally, or otherwise) to assert one position is better than the other. Analyzing this type of language can signal to others just how much the subject matters; this is reminiscent of the concept of “virtue signaling,” which is often used by reactionary right-wing individuals to “cast aspersions on opponents as an alternative to rebutting their argument” (Shariatmadari 2016). One example of this performative anger on Twitter can be seen below:

Figure 6: Tweet by Stan Edwards



In instances like this², burning the jersey is an action that signifies an immense anger, and rejection of the protest’s values. The act of posting about burning the jerseys reinforces the anger and serves as a display of being on the “right side.” Often such displays are performative in the way the individuals portray their anger, and also their correctness. For example, Twitter user @IronFalcon77 shared a link to a YouTube compilation of Kaepernick jerseys being burned³; consider the following screenshots from that video.

² This user, @kinch49, posted negatively using the words “spit on flag/anthem” about Marxists and Black Lives Matter 29 times from Sep. 24, 2017 and June 16, 2018. The tweet that was posted and located in my data scraping was deleted at the time of formatting, and so a similar one is shown here.
https://twitter.com/search?q=%40kinch49%20spit%20on%20flag%2Fanthem&src=typed_query&f=live

Figure 7: Three screenshots from video posted to YouTube



People burn Collin Kaepernick's Jersey Compilation



People burn Collin Kaepernick's Jersey Compilation



People burn Collin Kaepernick's Jersey Compilation

In the first, the person in the video appears to be enacting his anger and yelling at the viewer. The authoritative, aggressive, and punitive tone conveys how “disgusted” he is by the thought of the protests, and is making a stand against it. In the second screenshot, the jersey-burning may be seen as a family affair, with the decorative American flags showcasing just how strongly the family stands for the country’s “values.” In the third, the individual does not even have a real Kaepernick jersey, but instead a t-shirt with his name drawn on. This example conveys the symbolic aspect of this burning; an artifact was created specifically with the intention of being destroyed, and that destruction signifies being anti-protest. In all of these examples, a performative display of this opposition can be seen in “real” life, just as symbols appear online; motifs like the American flag convey the association with burning player-activist jerseys as an act of nationalism, and a celebration of national values.

The various ways individuals embody and behave related to the symbols of their political positions can reflect power and the construction of ignorance. As symbols like the American flag are displayed proudly alongside a racist jersey burning, and are used in tweets suggesting burnings, a willfully reasoned colorblind ignorance is constructed in the way that the movement for justice is just actively ignored because the protest is “un-American.” These reactions to the supposed desecration of “American values,” and the way those values are signified as upheld (e.g. holding and wearing American flags) tie AMERICAN AUTHORITY to ignorant discourse.

Tactical Delegitimation on Twitter

As described in the background, Nepstad and Kenney (2018) identify several key ways that anti-protest discourse is delegitimated. By delegitimizing the protests in the

discourse, there is an active attempt to almost “sell” how negative the motive is, an attempt to convince others that the protests are not worth it. Following from previous research, three themes of delegitimation were observed. The stigmatization of character, imposition of tactical costs, and creation of new negative meanings were observed frequently throughout the data. Investigating specific examples of these methods of tactical neutralization illuminates many theoretically relevant insights. The current study expands the previous findings onto the platform of Twitter, and illuminates how important symbols and symbolic language are for communicating delegitimation.

Stigmatization of character

The stigmatization of character is the first type of delegitimation to be described, and represents, essentially, making the players who are protesting out to be bad people. Examples of stigmatization include the protestors being called babies, losers, anti-American, whiners, idiots, bastards, dumbasses, and many more typical insults. These types of insults occurred approximately 630 times throughout the data. In some cases, they are made out to be bad people because they are protesting; in other cases, they are made out to be bad for other reasons, such as being “un-American.”

A common theme was the invocation of players' money and celebrity as a negative. Often, the restriction of funds in the form of fines, boycotts, etc., is meant to hurt players' and the league's wallet – which will be covered in the discussion of tactical costs. Many tweeted negatively about the protests, referring to the protesters derogatorily as “entertainers,” or “millionaires.” For example, “Mike Luke” (@PlanGuy) describes protestors as “not so NATIONAL entertainers,” and “Andy Wallingsford” (@A_Wallingsford) describes them as

a “bunch of unpatriotic millionaire whiny babies.” User “Doug the patriot!!” (@OlamaMohammed) asserts that the protestors are “rich thugs,” and that by protesting against police brutality, they support “career criminal thugs.”

Figure 8: Tweet by “Doug the patriot!!”



This post reflects an understanding that the protests are related to policing, but is essentially arguing that police brutality against “career criminal thugs,” is justified and probably even good. Such an understanding illustrates a belief that the police are upholding authority against enemies who need to be taken down, while clearly ignoring how racist and militarized the police are, especially against Black men. To me, this post is explicitly racist. To others, like the poster, it serves as a flag that they are not racist, and instead stand against the protests for other reasons. In framing the issue as anti-criminal and anti-thug, willfully reasoned logics of ignorance justify continued opposition to the protests. Building on this example, consider that former Houston Texans owner Bob McNair compared players protesting to “inmates running the prison” (Kay 2017); This illustrates an ignorance of the protests goals and insensitivity, especially in relation to the mass-incarceration of African Americans, and also highlights the power dynamics of a predominantly white owned league and Black players moving for justice.

These previous tweets and sentiments assert that in their roles as entertainers, millionaires, or people who "play a game", their opinions aren't valid or are superseded by the anthem song itself. Likewise, there lies the implication that by advocating for justice and for the end of police brutality NFL players are overstepping their boundaries. The day before the date of the current project's data, Donald Trump tweeted:

Figure 9: Tweet by Donald J. Trump



In this tweet, he seems to say the quiet part out loud, and states upfront that, 1) the job of being an NFL player is a “privilege,” and 2) that because they make millions of dollars protesting is not acceptable. Rather than doing activism, it seems that many would rather NFL players just “live with” the injustices and systemic inequality. This is similar to the description of Black Americans as “uppity,” stigmatizing them for advocating for themselves; as Reeve (2011) describes, such descriptions are racist and contribute to the perpetuation of unconscious bias and the normalization of racism.

Such stigmatizations of character reflect the manipulation and transformation of the overall protest frame, and also help to clarify individualized schemas. As individuals, including and especially influential figures like Donald Trump, change the meaning of the protests, or decry the protestors as villainous, the discursive frame of understanding is changed. In this case, Trump (and others’) descriptions of the protestors as “entertainers,”

who are “privileged” and “disrespectful” may shift the perceived framing from being a protest for more equity to a display of arrogance or defiance.

AMERICAN AUTHORITY may relate to the stigmatization of character. “American values” may encapsulate the ideas of hard work, like avoiding leisure and entertainment in order to participate in work, and also the authority of the laws and institutions of the land. As players are characterized as “entertainers,” they may be seen as lazy, not participating in the workforce, and just asking for handouts. Descriptions of criminality assert they are breaking from the institutional authority of the law. The willfully reasoned ignorance that is seen may represent an ideological response to the AMERICAN AUTHORITY schema. This example may also point to another aspect of “American Authority” that is being defended – capital. This may be seen in the idea that “entertainers” aren’t contributing to the economy or aren’t “doing Americanness” properly, and so they should be stigmatized. But it also relates to the prison industrial complex and mass incarceration, especially when considering how those in power (like the former owner of the Texans) characterize breaks from the norm.

Specifically, this example can be seen as “willfully reasoned colorblindness,” which describes “maneuvers that introduce alternate factors to neutralize evidence of white privilege and facilitate ongoing use of colorblind frames” (Mueller 2017:225). Ignorance is constructed with the stigmatization of character in the sense that the opposition to the protests is not because of active desire to uphold racist systems, but rather because the protestors are acting out too strongly.

New negative meanings

The creation of new negative meanings asserts that the protests are not about ending racial oppression and police violence against Blacks. When individuals create new, negative meanings for the protests, they assert that players are kneeling for other reasons – whether to protest Donald Trump, or to actively disrespect the flag or country. The assertion of new negative meanings includes deliberate assertions that the protests are against the anthem, or the flag, or against the President, that they are disrespectful, misguided, anti-soldier, police, or military. Statements like this occurred approximately 1121 throughout the data. These examples ranged from passive assertions of misguidedness, to active accusation of hostility. Examining the logics that justify standing against the protests also provides insight into ways by which discourses of denial are perpetuated.

Examining these new meanings also provides the clearest view into the processes involved with epistemological ignorance, particularly strategic ignorance and pluralistic ignorance (Mueller 2018). Strategic ignorance refers to the use of ignorance as a resource, where ignorance may be pursued because it is worth more than knowledge. Citing McGoe (2012), and Oreskes and Conway (2010), Mueller (2018:5) explains “how [strategic] ignorance can be used as an asset to command resources, deny liability, and assert expertise, personally and institutionally.” For example, Alexander (2010) and DuVernay (2016) show how mass-incarceration of African Americans is used as a form of social control, while also materially benefitting whites in power. In the case of the creation of new negative meanings, strategic ignorance occurs as the logics are used to increase their followers, ideological adherents, or economic gains. This can be seen in the widely popular manipulation by Trump on Twitter, and NASCAR’s organizational level framing of the protests as negative; Trump’s

tweets strategically amplify the new, false meanings to his fans and ideological allies, and NASCAR may benefit monetarily from viewers switching to their programming.

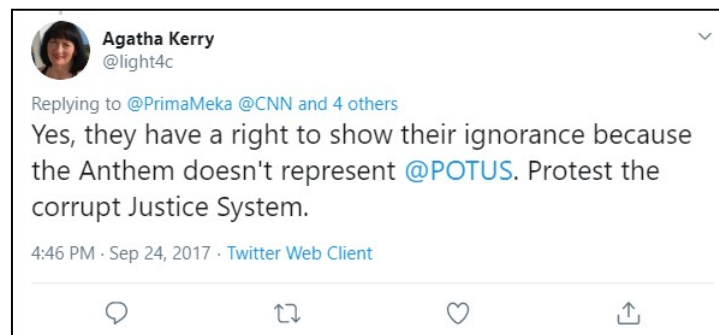
Pluralistic ignorance, “occurs when groups unwittingly reinforce misunderstanding a situation because people hold unwarranted assumptions about the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of others” (Mueller 2018:6). This type of ignorance is seen in the broad assertion of the “anthem protest” title, as it highlights the assumption that the protests are anti-anthem, and not anti-oppression. The prior example of the user complaining about “rich thugs” and “career criminal thugs” also demonstrates how underlying racism may connect to negative assumptions about other people. When one uses or creates a new negative meaning, they are reinforcing the belief that there are not social problems to be solved. Just as these new meanings are pieces of epistemic ignorance, they also relate to the processes of discursive framing, specifically frame transformation. Described by social movements scholars Benford and Snow (2000:625); this concept, “refers to changing old understandings and meanings and/or generating new ones.” On Twitter, many of the examples of new negative meanings take the real meaning, and re-frame it to fit the desired ideological context. In this way, the (re)construction of a frame with new negative meanings can be seen to align with the creation of epistemologies of ignorance.

When users post new negative meanings, they are posting manipulated and ignorant frames; often, when users post about new negative meanings, they are also doing so in an aggressive and actively oppositional way. For example, @Hock_35 tweeted that the protests are “ABOUT THE FLAG DUMMY [sic]” in response to a Breitbart headline that claims a “Democrat Congresswoman Urges All NFL Players to Kneel During Anthem to Protest Trump” (which is itself a new negative meaning). Here, the opposition is to the supposed

protests of the flag, but also to Donna Edwards, the former Democratic Congresswoman (Rodriguez 2017). In another example, @AZTruthTalker claims that, “Millionaire @NFL athletes kneeling in protest to @POTUS” are “embolden[ing] US enemies.” Here, there is a new negative meaning in the assertion that the protests are “to Trump,” but the other negative implication that this is emboldening enemies justifies opposing the protests.

Other examples of negative meaning creation assert the new negative meaning indirectly. For example, “Agatha Kelly” (@light4c) tweeted:

Figure 10: Tweet by “Agatha Kerry”



In their post, “Agatha” asserts a new negative meaning in two different ways. First, she asserts that the players protesting are ignorant, "because the Anthem doesn't represent @POTUS," in turn asserting that the protests are anti-Trump. She also asserts that players should, "Protest the corrupt Justice system," which clarifies the first statement. It also illustrates a theme throughout anti-protest discourse - that people speak authoritatively and negatively about the protests without understanding, or actively misconstruing, the meaning. In this way, we see how these arguments are made and justified, with the posters believing the information they have to be correct. “Agatha” is aware of the protests, and believes them to be anti-Trump; the fact that she is posting advice to the protesters shows that she believes her information to be more accurate than the protesters themselves. As Agatha has taken in

and processed the frame of “anti-Trump” protests (originally seen or taken in from the broad discourse or specific media), she is then contributing to that transformed frame. This tweet illustrates how although framing can often begin to be transformed from the top-down (like Donald Trump’s tweet from before), it is also strengthened and amplified throughout the discourse by those without much power.

To further analyze “Agatha’s” tweet, we can go into its composition. First, they highlight how misguided the protests are; then, they offer a solution, a command or at least suggestion to do it the way they perceive to be the “right way”. While the second part, “Agatha’s” suggestion, is especially egregious in that it suggests protesters do something that they’re already doing, they were certainly not alone in offering protesters advice and guidance – that they likely do not need or want. Others suggested taking the protests into the locker room, doing it before the anthem, or doing it in a more “civil” way; these arguments correspond with “tautologically reasoned ignorance,” which describes “maneuvers that produce racially conscious logic, but embed morally laden assumptions of whites’ sincere, passive ignorance” (Mueller 2017:225. The argument that the protests would be better off in some other form rests on the understanding that the protests are worth having (i.e. the argument is not saying that there is not racism), and that if it were to take place in another form, whites would listen. This sort of logic then justifies the perpetuation of ignorance, because as long as the protests are conducted “incorrectly,” there does not seem to be a reason to listen.

However the assertion is made, it highlights the belief that something is wrong with the protests. In these cases, there being a new, sometimes contrived, negative meaning allows for the protests to be delegitimized. “Agatha’s” tweet, and the assertion that players should

"Protest the corrupt Justice system," highlight that it is not always the actual meaning of the protests that individuals stand against. After all, their suggestion and corrective direction is 1) an admission that the justice system is corrupt, and 2) exactly what the protests are doing. Creating a new negative meaning (in "Agatha's" case, that the protests are against Donald Trump) enables the delegitimation and provides an easily justifiable way or one to stand against the protests.

In a similar way, twitter user "Mimz" (@the_first_mimzee) posted:

Figure 11: Tweet by "Mimz"



In this construction, the user is confirming that there really is a belief that the protests are against the anthem. What's more, "Mimz's" suggestion that the anthem not be played as a way of sticking it to the protestors is itself theoretically relevant. Alongside other tweets from that day, this analysis shows how the presence of the actual anthem (i.e. it being played in the stadium/on TV) matters to anti-protest discourse, and the importance of this symbol of America and American authority. Other users had differing opinions about whether or not the anthem should be played or displayed; even though these arguments are often couched in new negative meanings, and often have very different premises, they may altogether help to illuminate processes through which individuals relate to the protest discourse.

One of those other suggestions comes from Twitter user @SoniaFaye0865, who tweeted that, “The solution the NFL will eventually settle on is 2 stop playing the national anthem al2gether, the goal these ‘protests’. *[sic]*”. The premise of this tweet suggests that the meaning and goal of the protest is to stop playing the national anthem, which is a new negative meaning. To “Sonia,” the opposition to the protests (which is highlighted by the quotation marks) is thus grounded in a strong belief that the protests should be played; they are standing against the protest because the goal is “to stop playing the national al2gether.” Since they care so much about the anthem, the premise they seem to argue is that taking it away would be negative.

Interestingly, a Twitter user with the display name "Build the Wall 🇺🇸" has a similar view toward the protests, that they are negative, but with a different view of the anthem itself. This user posted that:

Figure 12: Tweet by “Build the Wall 🇺🇸”



In this tweet, the user suggests that it is acceptable to stop playing the anthem, because that is the best way to “stick it” to the players who are protesting. Contrasted against “Sonia’s” previous argument, that to stop playing the anthem would be negative, it is

insightful to consider how two opposing arguments can actually essentially have the same meaning. It is not about whether or not the anthem is played; rather it is about finding ways to oppose the protests (e.g. opposing it because of the anthem protest is being hypothetically stopped, and hypothetically stopping the protests as a punishment). In this way, such examples represent willfully reasoned ignorance, as these new negative meanings serve as justifications to keep on without addressing the oppression. This particular discussion and analysis becomes more interesting when also considering the fact that the players have only been on the field for the anthem since 2009; also, in 2015, it was uncovered that the Department of Defense was paying the NFL for displays of “Americanness” (e.g. flag displays, anthems, and reenlistment ceremonies), which was revealed in a Congressional oversight report by Senators Jeff Flake and John McCain (Schmitz 2017).

In all, observing the creation of new negative meanings helps to identify mechanisms of epistemologies of ignorance; furthermore, the framing of these new negative meanings, and the ways users amplify and frame their own messages, can help to understand how individualized schemas can be evoked by such frames. When individuals create new negative meanings, or amplify ones that are popular in the discourse, they do so in the process of excusing the perpetuation of oppression. Willfully reasoned ignorance and tautologically reasoned ignorance are both observed, as individuals frame the specific logics that they refer to as justifications to stand against the protests; pluralistic and strategic ignorance can be observed broadly in the creation of new negative meanings (Mueller 2017, 2018). Further, the hypothetical AMERICAN AUTHORITY schema may be observed in individual responses to the protests, and the way new negative meanings are implemented in the arguments. The last example, for instance, shows how despite having two opposite views on

the symbolic importance of the actual national anthem, two people could both have an anti-protest message. Challenges to the ideas of how protests “should look” according to “American values” may be helping these individuals structure their opposition to the protests.

When protestors “do it the wrong way”

Sometimes, individuals acknowledge that the protests during the anthem are necessary or even good, but stand against them all the same. In these scenarios, the argument is often raised that the protests are coming at the “wrong time,” whether that is while players are “on the clock,” during the anthem, or on the physical football field. Arguments like this tended to relate to players’ roles as workers, that they should happen off the field, before a game, after a game, or not at all; these arguments appeared 491 times on their own, but are often intertwined with other forms of delegitimation. This method of delegitimizing protests has been examined across the social movements literature, and is used to neutralize progress by establishing a “right way” that may not ultimately be the best way forward. This reactionary position ultimately lands on the position that while progress may be warranted, the path toward such progress should, unlike the protests, be “civil,” or “respectful.”

Another emergent theme that arose during the analysis is the assertion that protestors “do it on their own time.” This is similar to the way anti-Protest protestors often provide a suggestion or a corrective action, like the prior assertion that they “protest the corrupt justice system.” By making such statements, it creates the ability to say that they do support the protests, just not as it is currently constructed. For example, consider the following tweets:

Figure 13: Tweets by “Our Rustic Life” and “M Burdette”



As this argument essentially says, *OK, this is justified, except just not now on TV during the anthem*, it is not necessarily a new negative meaning. In this way, these arguments that the protests are worth it but just not done right reflect the tautologically reasoned ignorance described by Mueller (2017:225). They acknowledge that there is a need for progress, and that protests could be justified; however, because the protests during the anthem are “disrespectful” or go against “American values.” Furthermore, this epistemological maneuver rests on the assumption that *it can’t be that bad*; after all, there are successful Black Americans, and not all white people are racists. But, as Mueller writes, “[u]ltimately, this maneuver does more than provide psychic respite; it enshrines the entire ideological apparatus that makes whites’ material domination possible” (2017:231). Because progress is driven by collective action such as the protests during the anthem, this

justification essentially makes it clear that whoever is saying it believes progress should happen on their terms. Arguments like this effectively establish that the protestors and organizers do not have the authority to determine what progress is needed.

The assertion that players “do it on their own time,” also relates to their role as workers, with the premise being that that time is not “theirs,” and that time is not for activism, in a negative way. A way that players were stigmatized was that they are “entertainers,” and essentially speaks back to that premise, that NFL players should not think critically, but simply play football on the field. To be sure, this “stick to sports” logic is not specific to the protests in question. For example, such arguments have also come out when teams or players announce they won’t visit the Trump White House after a championship, or when athletes’ “political” stances. The Fox News host Laura Ingraham notably suggested that basketball star LeBron James “shut up and dribble” after he offered political opinions (Johnson 2018). Such examples illustrate how the idea of Black athletes protesting while “on the clock” is used as a willfully reasoned excuse for ignorance, by continuing on with colorblind discourses against movements and asserting that there is no need to address those social problems (Mueller 2017).

One final example of “doing it wrong” discourse lends several opportunities for investigating ignorance. “Becky Robbins” (@BeckyRo85225637) tweeted:

Figure 14: Tweet by “Becky Robbins”



This tweet explicitly recognizes that NFL players are workers, asserting that the protests should take place "off the clock." The tweet also seems to illuminate some confusion or some logical misalignment. The user writes that "standing for the Anthem does not induce racism;" this type of assertion seems to assume that players believe the counterfactual to be true, that kneeling for the anthem solves racism. This statement - either purposive or out of actual logical confusion - is important to understand, because it shows how some of those who stand against the protests are unwilling/unable to learn the meaning of the movement. Obviously, it is not like players are kneeling to somehow mystically stop racism from happening, so identifying the maneuvers that may lead one to draw such a conclusion is insightful.

In Becky's tweet, several epistemic maneuvers can be seen. First, tautologically reasoned ignorance is seen in the way that she argues "They should protest off the clock;" in this sentence, she is effectively stating that the protests would be fine if they were off the clock, but just not during the symbolic and revered anthem. It may also represent willfully reasoned colorblindness, as the excuse that the players are workers effectively justifies her opposition to the protests, which excuses her colorblindness. Finally, this may be an example of the mystification of practical solutions. Mueller describes such mystification as,

“maneuvers that produce racially conscious logic, but embed doubt and mystery about logically related solutions” (2017:225). She produces racially conscious logic by suggesting that the protests could be worth doing another time or place, but seems to mystify the solution with the sentence “Standing for the Anthem does not induce racism.” In this case, the solution is mystified within the creation of the new negative meaning, that the kneeling is almost a ceremonial act to stop the “induction” of racism. The protests during the anthem represent an anti-racist action that “research and experience would logically advise,” and so the creation of new negative meanings that obscure the real meaning may likewise mystify progressive pathways.

The previous example is especially insightful because it illuminates the complexity of epistemological ignorance, at least as it occurs on Twitter. As described, the tweet corresponds with three epistemic maneuvers of ignorance: willfully reasoned colorblindness, tautologically reasoned ignorance, and the mystification of solutions. Willfully reasoned colorblindness is represented by her introduction of alternate factors, that the protests are happening on the clock, to justify her opposition and continue on with the rejection of the protests. While this does illustrate a willful reasoning of colorblindness – that we can’t address the issue because the movement is happening on the clock – it also represents other forms of ignorance that are folded in.

Unlike willfully reasoned colorblindness, which avoids racially conscious logic, tautologically reasoned ignorance and the mystification of practical solutions *do* produce racially conscious logic (Mueller 2017:225). In my analysis, I see the racially conscious component in the acknowledgement that, although the protests during the anthem are unacceptable, they could be worth doing another time. While it may seem contradictory to

suggest that one tweet at once maneuvers around racial acknowledgement and also produces racial consciousness, the current tweet serves as an example of that; with each clause of her tweet, the user builds on her previous logics. The model of ignorance I just describes hinges on the assumption that individuals are sincere in their racial consciousness, though; it assumes that when users say “protest somewhere/time else” that they are actually processing that there is a goal of ending racial oppression.

It is *entirely* possible, and maybe even likely, that these arguments are not sincere. Epistemic maneuvers and logics that construct ignorance allow for such contradictions to be rationalized and processed by those who oppose the protests (Mueller 2017). Here, schemas and frames can help to understand how these individual molds their logics and maneuvers to the protest discourse. As new negative meanings are created about the protests, and the broad discursive framing of the protests come to be shaped around those new negative meanings, users take in, and then amplify those same frames and meanings. These users post what they post because the framing evoked some personally meaningful schema of understanding. The new negative meanings of anti-anthem, anti-flag, and anti-productivity evoke a response where, even if it is contradictory, logics and maneuvers can justify ignorance. I see the hypothetical AMERICAN AUTHORITY schema throughout the previous examples, as defending the institutional authority of “America,” the President, and capital can be seen throughout the posts.

Imposing tactical costs

Alongside the creation of new negative meanings and the stigmatization of character, the imposition of tactical costs is a neutralization strategy that asserts that punitive action

should be taken against the protestors. In a marquee example of such an imposition, Donald Trump tweeted that players should be fired for participating in the protests. And as Trump's tweet came the day before the date of this study's tweets, it is an especially impactful example of frame articulation and transformation. Still, there is much to be learned about how individuals consume that frame, and relate their own logics and language to justify the imposition of tactical costs.

Frame amplification and articulation do not only occur from figureheads like Trump, but also other institutions and individuals for whom ignorance would be beneficial. For example, an example that occurred in many tweets compared the policies of the National Football League to those of NASCAR. In a popular article, the heads of NASCAR established that drivers *would* be dismissed from the organization for any sort of demonstration, as reported by the Associated Press (Shelbourne 2017). Tweets that related directly to NASCAR were many, with some users indicating that they would switch to watch NASCAR (n=71 total tweets). While these impositions of tactical costs were hypothetical, and from an organizational level, it is insightful to observe the "fanhood" of individuals losing their jobs for protesting oppression. Furthermore, it is interesting to consider why an "unrelated" organization would contribute to such discourse in the first place.

As NASCAR (the organization) made it clear that they *would* punish any dissidents, they amplify that outcome as an acceptable frame. And as they amplify and further articulate their position, they signal to their fans that they are *not* the NFL (that was organizationally allowing the protests to continue). NASCAR's strategic exclamation of their "American values" may serve as a strategic point for followers to latch onto. Just as with individualized evocations of the AMERICAN AUTHORITY schema, NASCAR's contribution to the

discourse appeals to “real American values;” from an organizational standpoint, this strategy is meant to appeal to those who have a strongly embedded understanding of those values. Discussing symbolic community boundaries, Cohen (1985:53) writes that community boundary, “creates a sense of belonging, of identity – and, by the same token, of difference from others.” While this relates specifically to NASCAR’s actions, it relates broadly to the construction of anti-protest symbolic opposition; NASCAR fans can signal to others that they are a part of an “American values” fandom, opposed to the NFL.

NASCAR signals to fans and consumers that they are *not* the sports league that will tolerate such breaches of authority, as opposed to the NFL. And by doing so, they signal to fans and spectators which league is “most American.” The way that NASCAR articulates their organizational position amplifies an ignorant frame, all the while evoking and attracting individual fans who prefer to side with a league that shares the same values. This example shows how framing processes are used to generate and draw in resources, and as such illustrates strategic ignorance (Mueller 2018) and strategic framing (Benford and Snow 2000).

Like the NASCAR commissioner asserting that drivers would be punished, tweets that impose tactical costs make it clear that if the protests continue, there will be costs; these costs range from fines or suspensions up to death. The imposition of tactical costs makes it clear that the user stands against the protests. The imposition of tactical costs occurs in the discourse as arguments that players should be fired, suspended, deported, sent to warzones, or otherwise have their livelihoods taken away; examples such as this occurred approximately 1,761 times. Further, it shows that they stand against them with enough

perceived authority not just to disagree, but to suggest negative outcomes for a movement toward equality and justice.

An important consideration for the analysis of tactical costs is a specific part of the discourse surrounding the event: "#BoycottNFL." #BoycottNFL was a popular hashtag that serves as a way to mark one as standing against the protests as part of a boycott. Some tags, like "#Istand" observed previously, relate to the protest discourse in general; slightly differently, "#BoycottNFL" itself represents a desire to impose a cost, that the individual is not watching. This hashtag appeared 67 times in the data, while the word "boycott" appeared 1,032 times, again illustrating the decline of importance in hashtags to Twitter discourse.

The #BoycottNFL hashtag made it easy for anti-protest users to contribute to the discourse with the ease of just replicating the hashtag. Some users that advocate a boycott choose not to include the hashtag, and rather adapt the messaging to their own words. In these tweets we see that some users would rather contribute to the discourse in their own way. Whether it is by simply stating that they will boycott without the hashtag, or explicating their detailed logic, these users illustrate how the platform of Twitter is accessed by individuals in order to contribute their share of the discourse.

Establishing such an antagonistic relationship with the protestors is in line with the AMERICAN AUTHORITY schema, with ideologically authoritarian and colorblind individuals opposing the breaches of American values. If one has the characteristics of being a "bad American," like "disrespecting the anthem," they can be considered "the enemy." For example, Trump has tweeted about "enemy of the people" thirty-five (35) times, primarily about anti-Trump media coverage (Trump Twitter Archive). Another pertinent example of one of those negative characteristics could be the mention of Marxism or socialism. Because

those words evoke the history of Red Scare McCarthyism, and counter American capitalistic “liberty,” they could potentially be seen as antagonistic to AMERICAN AUTHORITY.

Importantly, such a frame and schema illustrate the mechanism of strategic ignorance, which through a Marxist lens can illuminate structures of power and class. Observing how such binary antagonism is established is insightful for analyzing what makes one a “have” and what makes one a “have-not;” furthermore, such an analysis can help to identify characteristics and beliefs that mark one as being a “good American,” and in that sense represent a sort of *reverse intersectionality* (wherein the various intersectional characteristics justify being an oppressor, rather than the oppressed).

The punishments that are frequently suggested, such as fining, suspending, and boycotting, are meaningful actions that would have negative impacts on those protesting. Still, these are relatively mundane when considered against some other costs that were imposed. Other costs, like death, or being sent to a war zone, illuminate just how powerfully some individuals stand against the protests, and highlight just how impactful military veneration and symbols are.

Military and police symbols in delegitimation

One of the most insightful emergent themes is the presence and use of police and military themes to justify standing against the protests. Some users that invoked the military often did so in the context of veterans or remembrance. Others did so as a threat, a way of imposing another cost to protesting. Even if the language of a tweet didn't mention the military, military symbols such as avatars, ranks, or insignias that individuals identify with can align the post with a mindset of veneration for the military.

Military language and symbols are insightful for understanding how anti-protest meanings are made because they show how these institutions relate to a protest against inequality. In the frames that are established by people who follow these arguments, such a protest and movements for justice are not acceptable because they go against American values. And while taking stock of “American values” may be outside of the scope of the current project, understanding what people seem to assert them to be is helpful for understanding discourse and symbols of anti-protest discourse. The US Military is certainly an aggressive, colonial force in the geopolitical sense. The analysis shows that, with regard to the invocation of the military, there can also be meaningful symbolic aggression and violence. These meanings can be seen in the form of tactical costs, new negative meanings, stigmatizing character, and identity markers.

“Gristle McThornbody” (@DadLibertarian) offers a different perspective, one that may further demonstrate that it is not even about denying the protests, but rather the veneration for the military (alongside the associated symbolism). They write, “All NFL millionaires who want to protest racism during National Anthem should do it with combat wounded veterans next to them. #Jackoffs.” In this case, there isn't a traditional new negative meaning being attributed - they acknowledge (or at least do not deny) that the protest is against racism. Rather, they assert a new meaning by saying that it is anti-military, which seems to assert that veneration for the military is more important than ending racial oppression. The point of the NFL protests is not to disrespect veterans, or the flag, or the anthem, but that reasoning is used to justify being anti-protest. In the case of @DadLibertarian's tweet, one could argue that the logic is tautologically reasoned because it has some racial consciousness – they acknowledge that the protest is against racism;

however, such examples do not, “embed morally laden assumptions of whites’ sincere, passive ignorance” (Mueller 2017:225). Rather, even though race is acknowledged, military veneration (or lack thereof) is taken to be inherently more important than challenging the racism in question.

One especially interesting theme that is particularly ghastly is the imposition of tactical costs relating to military service. These tweets show the lengths to which people think (or at least say they think) players should be punished. In these cases, it also shows that it isn't the topic or actual motive of the protest that is being challenged, but rather the audacity of the protestors to dare protest against the current system.

Figure 15: Tweet by @oneheartDON



In his reaction to the article, he eventually arrives at the conclusion that protestors should "Go join the military." While it is difficult to discern the exact meaning (because of the tweet's disjointedness), the premise seems to be that players should join the military in order to be able to protest during the anthem. Assuming that the suggestion isn't just for the protestors to die in the military, it seems that the directive to "go join," would be to impart these players with some "Americanness" that can only be understood with military service.

A second example (from “Matthew Saunders”) posits that rather than having to enlist in war, NFL players should “have to fight a Marine for the right to protest anthem.” This tweet introduced a number of insights that illustrate how someone like “Matthew may” find meaning in standing against the protests. First, it shows that – despite all of the *en vogue* discussions of freedom of speech being challenged – the right to protest is not inherent. Further, while the project does not necessarily relate directly to masculinities, the macho/tough guy attitude here (and in other angry tweets) may be an interesting study of online identity. Finally, “Matthew” includes the label of “globalist,” which is meant to denigrate multiculturalism, and is a right-wing, Alt-Right term frequently used by conspiracy theorists including Alex Jones.

The framing of the protests as anti-flag, anti-anthem, and anti-America may evoke the image of the protestors as enemies, which may lead to conflict and opposition from those who revere AMERICAN AUTHORITY. Still, such conflict is rooted in actively constructed ignorance. By logically maneuvering around the racism, and instead making it about military support, oppression is perpetuated. Further, strategic framing of the protests as somehow being “anti-military,” may be deliberate; such a strategically ignorant frame makes it easy to frame protestors as anti-military or un-American, even though the protests are actually about something else. What’s more, such a frame makes legitimate criticism of power near impossible; if any sort of criticism of military (or police) power will be met with powerfully amplified ignorance, meaningful progress toward peace domestically and abroad may become increasingly difficult to work toward. Thinking back to Adorno’s “F-scale” of fascism, these reactions to breaks from AMERICAN AUTHORITY may illuminate the casualness of fascist discourse online.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The current project has served two goals: first, to better understand the logics that justify standing against racial justice; and second, to clarify the value of qualitative methodology with regard to tweets. On both fronts, valuable insights can be seen.

Theoretically, it illuminates discursive and symbolic processes that may help researchers better understand how racial injustices and progress toward equality are effectively denied. Methodologically, important insights into both the advantages and drawbacks of the current design are gained, and recommendations for future research are made. Overall, the study shows how meanings can be extracted from a digital space such as Twitter, and how users take to Twitter to build meanings around social movements.

Theoretical relevance

Tweets about the protests during the national anthem reveal many theoretical insights into ignorance, attitudes toward racism, social movements, and the denial of racism; the data also illuminates several theoretical inroads for future consideration. The current research supports existing literature related to epistemological ignorance and social movements, and illuminates that these social processes similarly exist on Twitter. As previously illustrated in “real life” by Jennifer Mueller (2017, 2018), processes related to epistemologies of ignorance were also seen on Twitter; strategic ignorance and pluralistic ignorance are present in popular

themes of discourse that justify standing against the protests. Likewise, efforts to neutralize the protests in newspaper website comment sections as described by Nepstad and Kenney (2018) appears in the current data. The stigmatization of character, imposition of tactical costs, and creation of new negative meanings as described by the authors show how individuals justify arguing against an anti-racist movement. Colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2017) can broadly be seen across the data, as individuals frame their positions to essentially say that even if there is racism, it is not worth addressing or paying attention to it.

Discursive processes such as the framing of the movement were also clear throughout the tweets. Benford and Snow describe the processes of framing collective actions like the protests during the national anthem; processes of discursive articulation and amplification, strategic framing and frame transformation all appear in the current data. This connection helps to illustrate the utility of Twitter in studying social movement framing, and also connects the framing of the movement to the facilitation of epistemologies of ignorance. Wood, et al (2018) clarifies how latent understandings of cultural values, schemas, may be evoked by certain frames, which may be seen in the hypothetical AMERICAN AUTHORITY schema referred to throughout the analysis. Seeing how individuals utilize Twitter to frame their position relative to the protests is certainly insightful, but it is necessary to consider the framing of the protests offline as well. Boykoff and Carrington (2019) discuss how the popular media framing and description of the ongoing protests as “anthem protests,” was a detriment to the overall effectiveness of the collective action; this framing and description is observed in the data, and such a framing may have catalyzed the creation of new negative meanings as observed. Hallett et al. (2019) discuss the trajectory of public ideas, how social science ideas come to be understood by the public, and recommend

future studies into public ideas; I see the current project as fitting into that literature, as it shows how the public framing of the protests connects to micro-level processes of ignorance.

Future directions and insights

Although the results illustrate important theoretical processes that can help researchers better understand constructed ignorance, many important questions and insights are left unaddressed. Some of these relate directly to the current data and the protests during the anthem. Others regard social movements in general, or similar discourses in other contexts. Clarifying around these opportunities for further research may provide future researchers with inroads and insights that may allow for more social processes to be uncovered.

My analysis, as demonstrated throughout the results, focused on the symbolic and logical patterns that could be seen throughout the dataset. A supplemental quantitative analysis could potentially provide different results. For example, such an analysis could identify central nodes, or potentially identify which posts were being done by bot accounts. Such an analysis could also include data that isn't related to the particular search term, and with sufficient access to the Twitter API, could analyze thousands more nodes. Still, such analysis may not necessarily provide the subjective insights into the logics of ignorance seen throughout my findings. Another opportunity within the current dataset is the inclusion and analysis of pro-protest tweets, which would allow for a bigger picture focus on the "legitimation battle" that is described by Nepstad and Kenney (2018). Gallagher (2019) produced a visualization and analysis of what she calls "Trump Trains," what she calls the follow-for-follow networks of some Trump-supporting Twitter users, which illustrate the

various connections these have and illuminate “hub” users, who are particularly important. Critics and scholars also highlight that Twitter often serves as an “echo chamber,” with attitudes and beliefs reiterated and supported dependent on a user’s connections, and certainly this type of network analysis helps to illustrate a deliberate echo chamber in action (Ray, et al:2017:3). Although none of the users from the current study appear in her overview, the use of tags, specific language, symbols, and the enthusiasm of ignorance in posting are similar to many seen in the data. Future studies may pay particular attention to these “hotspots” of data, and the language and symbols they use to build their follower-count.

Insights gleaned throughout the current analysis also demonstrate opportunities for expansion of the current project. First, expanding a similar framework and methodology to other platforms, and then comparing the results, could produce an insightful synthesis. Furthermore, examining the framing of and responses to other issues could be insightful. For example, examining negative responses to the New York Times’s *1619 Project* (writing about the historical legacy of slavery in the United States), and negative framings of socialism and antifascism may illuminate similar schemas being evoked. Frames that run counter to the idea of progress remain prevalent, and likely will, so a continued drive to understand those processes may be useful for achieving justice.

While the breadth of the study certainly did allow for important themes to be examined and related to previous research, heightened theoretical and methodological focus in future studies would provide researchers more specific examples of the processes of ignorance. With the broad search term of “NFL anthem protest,” thousands of tweets were syndicated re-posts of the same handful of articles, likely being tweeted automatically from

whichever blog hosting service was used; similarly, many individuals simply posted links to news stories without comment. This supports Java's description of Twitter as a place to share news, but also greatly diffused theoretically rich posts (2009). One way for further research to avoid such a problem is to focus on one or more "hub" tweets (such as those with a certain amount of engagement, or those that have been purposively identified), and then qualitatively analyze the replies; this allows for meaningful insights into the ways people justify their positions in a more focused sense. Another way would be to identify smaller scale events or digital settings that relate to social movements, so that a broad analysis is not as unwieldy.

The current data illuminates broad theoretical themes that help to connect social movement framing, discourses of delegitimation, and epistemologies of ignorance. Still, more focused analyses into processes of racialization, masculinities and misogyny, identity, and politics may be gained with a more focused sample or research design. Such a new design could potentially search for particular terms or symbols across the data, or key into particular purposively selected discourse. Having a more focused design may help to come up with more cogent and cohesive arguments with regard to specific *types* of ignorant discourse; for example, if two sibling studies investigated processes of racism on Twitter versus processes of misogyny, potentially relevant differences in symbols or processes could be seen. Finally, the current project's analysis ignored pro-protest discourse, as it was not possible to meaningfully connect the relevant symbols and the language; while some patterns did emerge, such as it seeming like pro-protest discourse often came as a challenge to ignorant assertions, the diffusion across the data makes it difficult to formulate a definitive argument. Studying how pro-movement tweets and symbols occur on Twitter may allow for

an interesting comparison to the current study.

On the whole, this study provides valuable evidence and insight into processes of epistemologies of ignorance. Hundreds or thousands of previous social science articles and books have illuminated processes of systemic racism and oppression; the lived experiences and oral histories of Black Americans likewise illuminate racist processes and police oppression. Across politics and culture, a common plea is for the two “sides” of an argument to come together to find understanding. This project helps to illuminate that “understanding,” may be a futile goal, especially as the discourse is shaped and framed around an active anti- understanding. When social scientific and anecdotal knowledge can simply be rejected and denied, finding “understanding” may require more collective action, and certainly more empirical investigation.

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